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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/CACEN, SA, OES

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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN'S ENVIRONMENT SUFFERS DUE TO LACK OF FUNDS

1. Funding and management problems prevent Tajikistan from protecting its natural resources. In a December 2 meeting with PolOff, Rustam Latipov, Deputy Chairman of the State Committee for Environmental Protection and Forestry (SCEPF) complained that the government fails to recognize the benefits of organizing sustainable development programs or developing eco-tourism. The government is taking slow steps to protect the environment, but Tajikistan's 2.6 million hectares of natural environment relies on the help of international organizations to protect it.

2. One necessary step would be to identify animal and plant species that need special protection. Local news agency Avesta reported in early 2006 that Tajikistan will print its "Red Book," a catalogue of animal and plant species protected by the state. However, Latipov informed us that the Red Book may not be published due to a lack of funds.

3. "Hunting helps protected animals," declared Latipov. One of the animals Latipov refers to is the Marco Polo sheep, "protected" by the Red Book, and prized by hunters for their horns. Revenues from approximately 40 hunting licenses granted each year, and a \$10,000 tax per sheep, go to the local administration for the specific purpose of protecting local species. Fearful of losing hunting commissions, Latipov claimed that Western and American hunters are not responsible for the decline in number of Marco Polo sheep. Rather, impoverished locals hunt the sheep for food, having no other income alternatives. NGOs are working to establish sustainable development alternatives for rural populations, but have not been able to reach all groups. Latipov estimates that about 16,000 Marco Polo sheep remain in Tajikistan. The Wildlife Conservation Society claims the figure is closer to 10,000. Latipov acknowledged that the sheep population has dropped significantly, but in the end he was unable to provide specific figures.

4. With the help of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, SCEPF submitted a new draft environmental law to the appropriate ministries. Latipov explained that environmental legislation adopted in 1993 during the civil war is out of date, and SCEPF rewrote the law to comply with international law and standards. If parliament accepts these revised laws, it will be an improvement towards environmental protection. However, the government lacks the resources and motivation to enforce environmental laws. If the government does not begin to take environmental issues seriously, it risks losing species (and revenue) from magnificent animals like the Marco Polo sheep.
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